

November 3, 1959

Dr. Aaron Novick  
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Dear Aaron:

Thank you for your note and Szillard's letter of the 28th. Too bad we drew a blank here but we can try other ways.

I made a quite determined effort at the meeting of the Space Science Board to get a review of the Man-in-Space Program. But I didn't really have to try too hard since I think that most or all of the members of the Board are in complete accord with your and my views about it. The trouble is that national policy on the space program is set at much higher levels. Science is only one of three objectives of the space program, which include also a firm decision, probably by the National Security Council and by the President's Scientific Advisory Committee that Man-in-Space should have high priority primarily as a means of restoring American prestige. This is certainly a debatable conclusion but the debate is a political rather than a scientific one. There are also many people in NASA who share our reservations.

The best thing we can do meantime may be (1) to try to set the highest possible standards for the scientific work that is done in support of Man-in-Space, and (2) to let it be known at least obliquely that there are many positive objectives and accomplishments of space science quite apart from Man-in-Space. The Space Science Board as such has never had anything to do with this program and I believe it may be both desirable and feasible to indicate a dissociation from it without repudiating it which would be beyond the scope of its authority and responsibilities. In the long run it may even be possible to temper the program to make it serve some useful ends.

I might say that my own predilections are that we should abandon the race with the Russians in the field of chemical rocketry all together since our greatest efforts are calculated to do no more than keep us one or two years behind them. Even if we construe this as a strictly competitive situation what a futile effort! If we had the patience, we could afford to leapfrog them by putting a much greater effort into more advanced methods of propulsion. But I am afraid even the scientists, not to mention the politicians, are far too impatient for signs of American achievement in the space field to be able to support such a program.

- 2 -

The scheme of setting up an automatically fed TV microscope becomes more and more appealing to me as time goes on. A group of us, especially at the Biophysics Laboratory, are planning some more concrete efforts in this direction. Have you had any practical experience with this kind of instrumentation?

I think I will be going to Nice in mid-January to represent the Board on questions of exobiology at the Cospar Congress. If you have any further thoughts to be injected before then please send them on. I'm not too keen to have another Westex meeting until some more concrete issues develop. If, as is quite possible, there will be a Geneva type United Nations Conference on space science later on in 1960 we might want to sharpen up some of our positions for this. All expectations are that the Russians will be attending at Nice.

Eugene Kinkad from the New Yorker sent on a translation of a bit in Pravda on the rationale of the decontamination of Lunik: this turns out to have been written by Ierusalimskii. I don't know whether you met him at the Stockholm Congress last summer; I first ran into him at the Ciba Conference on Drug Resistance in March '57. His article did not say a great deal (it was pretty close to Bisset's piece in the Listener a little while ago) but at least he is a microbiologist and someone that it is possible to begin to talk to except on the basic issues of microbial adaptation.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

*Enc: Ldr article*